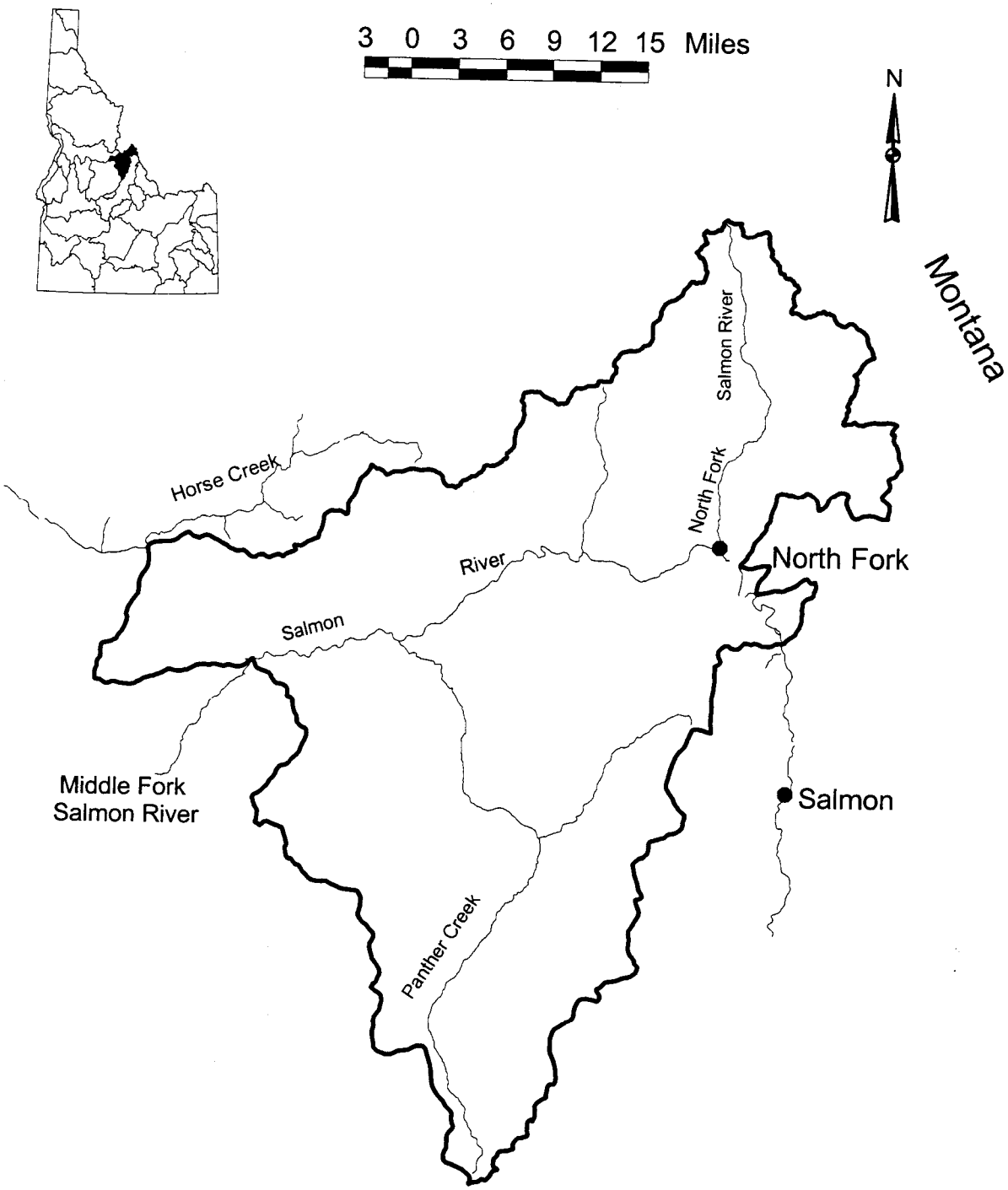
Salmon River Drainage

Horse Creek to North Fork



10. SALMON RIVER DRAINAGE – HORSE CREEK TO NORTH FORK

A. Overview

The Salmon River drainage includes 14,100 square miles and flows 410 miles from its headwaters in Blaine County in south central Idaho to its confluence with the Snake River in Idaho County in northwestern Idaho. Upstream from the confluence of the Middle Fork, the Salmon River is lower gradient and it flows through open canyon and broad valleys. The portion from Horse Creek to North Fork is 50 miles long and is located entirely within Lemhi County. There is only a trail along the river from Horse Creek upstream to Corn Creek, and a road along the river for 46 miles from Corn Creek to the North Fork. There is a boat ramp at Corn Creek that receives heavy use from floaters during the summer months and jet boaters during the fall and spring steelhead seasons. Boats are the primary mode of access below Corn Creek.

The Salmon River is a Wild and Scenic River. From Vinegar Creek (near Riggins) to Corn Creek, the river is classified as "wild," and from Corn Creek to the North Fork, it is classified as "recreational."

From Horse Creek to the North Fork, the Salmon River has a history of mining activity. Gold was discovered near Shoup in 1881 and a mining town quickly developed. Cobalt is a mining community on Panther Creek that once had a population of more than 500 people when the Blackbird Mine was operational.

Fishing is an important recreational activity in this area, particularly steelhead fishing. Wild and natural steelhead migrate to this area in the early fall and overwinter prior to resuming their spawning migration in the spring. Since wild and hatchery stocks intermingle and wild stocks are consistently underescaped, harvest occurs on hatchery fish only (identified by adipose fin clips). The mainstem Salmon will continue to be managed for exploitation of hatchery steelhead, but consumptive harvest is not expected on naturally produced steelhead or chinook during the next five years. Naturally produced steelhead will continue to provide incidental catch-and-release fishing in the Salmon River.

The Panther Creek drainage contains nearly 100 miles of streams. Historically, it reportedly supported chinook runs of 2,000 spawners in addition to substantial runs of steelhead. Although habitat is in good condition, by the late 1960s, anadromous fish runs had declined due to poor water quality as a result of mine effluents. A small number of juvenile salmon and steelhead currently use Panther Creek for rearing and only in the lowermost portions of the drainage. In the last five years substantial cleanup efforts have been implemented to improve the water quality in this drainage.

The North Fork drainage contains about 60 miles of stream, some of which have been negatively impacted by mining, logging, and channelization. It currently supports limited chinook and steelhead spawning and rearing. Other smaller tributaries to the main Salmon, such as Indian, Colson, and Pine creeks, primarily support steelhead spawning and rearing.

Small numbers of white sturgeon inhabit the river downstream from Horse Creek and may be present upstream. Limited habitat is available and, historically, sturgeon were present at least as far upstream as Salmon.

Westslope cutthroat trout emigrate from the Middle Fork Salmon River to overwinter in this portion of the Salmon River.

Despite the presence of secondary roads in many of the tributary drainages, low to moderate fishing effort is expended for resident trout species in these areas. Also, resident trout populations are low in the main river during the summer months due to warm temperatures and, consequently, low to moderate fishing effort is expended during this period.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Maintain existing natural spawning populations of salmon and steelhead.

   Program: Allow natural production to sustain existing naturally produced populations. Maintain enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with differential harvest regulations to protect wild steelhead. Do not outplant hatchery steelhead and salmon into the mainstem or tributaries, from Horse Creek upstream to the North Fork Salmon River, to preserve wild fish genetic resources.

2. Objective: Maintain and improve habitat quality of tributary production areas.

   Program: Oppose land use activities that further degrade the quality of natural production areas. Participate in allotment management plan review. Encourage implementation of grazing management plans that eliminate negative grazing impacts to fishery productivity and survival. Participate in interagency mining oversight committees to review operating plans and work with regulatory agencies to require strict compliance with mining laws to protect water quality and fish populations. Develop monitoring programs for fish populations and fish habitat relative to mining activities, if needed. Implement rehabilitation measures for Panther Creek drainage.

3. Objective: Correct passage problems such as irrigation diversions, road culverts, and dewatered stream segments that restrict anadromous and resident fish access to spawning tributaries.

   Program: Cooperate with Lemhi County and the USFS in identifying and constructing fish passage improvement structures for culverts. Identify and screen or repair irrigation diversions where needed. Work with the Upper Salmon River Model Watershed Project to reconnect tributary streams.

4. Objective: Improve the quality of cutthroat trout fishing in the mainstem Salmon River during the summer months.

   Program: Continue restrictive harvest fishery regulations on wild trout in the mainstem river.

DRAINAGE: Salmon River: Horse Creek-North Fork					
Water	Miles/acres	Fishery			Management direction
		Type	Species present	Management	
From Horse Creek to North Fork	50/	Coldwater Anadromous	Wild/natural steelhead Chinook salmon	Conservation	Maintain adult harvest closure until MFSR and upper Salmon River escapement goals are met.
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
			Hatchery steelhead	Anadromous	Provide maximum yield of fish surplus to escapement goals.
			Cutthroat trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest to protect MFSR cutthroat trout, which migrate to and overwinter in this area.
			Rainbow trout Whitefish	General	Limited yield fishery during summer.
Tributaries from Horse Creek to North Fork (Except Horse Creek, Panther Creek)	150/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Brook trout Whitefish	Wild trout	Provide harvest fishery supported by natural production.
			Chinook Salmon Steelhead	Conservation	Maintain adult harvest closure.
			Bull trout		Closed to harvest.
Horse Creek	19/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Whitefish	Wild trout	Naturally supported harvest fishery. Access restricted to trail or boat.
			Steelhead Chinook salmon	Conservation	Maintain adult harvest closure. No hatchery supplementation. Important spawning/rearing tributary for wild, A-strain steelhead.
			Bull trout		Closed to harvest.
Panther Creek	33/	Coldwater Anadromous	Steelhead Chinook salmon	Conservation	Maintain adult harvest closure. Stock with fry, smolts or adults as available. Work with other agencies to clean up mining pollution from Blackbird Mine and develop anadromous reintroduction program.
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
			Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout	General	Provide harvest fishery supported by natural production.

North Fork Salmon River	22/	Coldwater Anadromous	Rainbow trout Brook trout Chinook salmon Steelhead Bull trout Cutthroat trout	General Conservation	Provide harvest fishery supported by natural production. Closed to adult harvest. Closed to harvest.
North Fork Salmon River Tributaries		Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Cutthroat trout Whitefish Bull trout	General Conservation	Provide harvest fishery supported by natural production. Closed to harvest.
Alpine Lakes	/233	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout	General	Aerial stock selected lakes with fry on a three-year rotational basis. Collect baseline data on lakes in cooperation with USFS.